

NORFOLK

# Why magic is leaving our meadowland

A shocking new report has revealed that nearly 70pc of meadows in Norfolk are in poor or declining condition - with one in 10 no longer attractive to wildlife.

With the vibrant green grass gently swaying in the breeze and the odd wild flower dotted around to add a dash of colour, there is something almost magical about a summer meadow.

But, according to the Norfolk Wildlife Trust report, it is a sight which is disappearing from our countryside.

Figures from the three-year study show, of the 60 grassland County Wildlife Sites (CWS) visited, 69pc were in poor or declining condition and 10pc were damaged to such an extent that they were no longer of sufficient interest to wildlife to remain as CWS.

Development had adversely affected 18pc of sites while only three were in good or excellent condition - this represents 5pc of the sites visited and only 2pc of the area.

Helen Baczkowska, conservation officer and author of the report, said: "The report found that the biggest single obstacle to appropriate management on sites was a lack of resources, with 72pc of the sites visited not being managed appropriately for this reason alone.

By TARA GREAVES  
Environment correspondent

There is a serious need to improve the perception of meadows and to raise awareness of why they are so vital. Resources and mechanisms to ensure sustainable management need to be developed."

Grassland CWS are broadly defined as those where the principle wildlife interest is for plant species reliant upon open, sunny conditions.

Traditionally, they were managed as pasture for grazing or by a seasonal cycle of hay cutting and grazing.

These effectively remove each year's growth, creating nutrient-poor conditions ideal for a range of wild plants and consequently their attendant species such as meadow brown butterflies, field voles, skylarks and hunting barn owls.

As a result of the State of Norfolk's Magical Meadows report, questions about whether it is possible to reverse the fortunes of the sites are now being asked.

In the coming year, the wildlife trusts's Magical Meadows Initiative will continue providing advice to CWS owners and helping them find financial or practical help with the management of their sites.

It also aims to provide information



**GOOD MEADOW, BAD MEADOW:** Above, species-rich meadow in good condition. Right, a County Wildlife Site grassland in declining condition, representative of 69pc of the meadows in Norfolk.

Pictures: NORFOLK WILDLIFE TRUST

on the value and sensitive management of wildlife sites and increasing the general awareness of the wildlife value of meadows.

Director of Norfolk Wildlife Trust Brendan Joyce said: "It is hoped that the findings of this report will be used to develop strategies to improve the fortunes of struggling wildlife sites, as these are very important for the future survival of much of our wildlife."

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NORWICH

## Mum-of-five spared jail for false claims

A mother-of-five who fraudulently claimed about £40,000 in benefits was yesterday given a suspended prison sentence and ordered to do 150 hours' unpaid work.

Jane Rowles, 31, falsely claimed the money over three years by stating she was a single parent with five children when in fact her husband lived with her and was in work.

She had previously pleaded guilty to the two counts of failing to give notice of change in circumstances - one a charge involving income support and the other involving housing and council tax benefit.

Norwich Crown Court heard Rowles, of Birbeck Road, Norwich, received the benefits from August 1998 to June 2006 on the basis she was a single mum with five children.

But Victoria Burgess, for the Department for Work and Pensions, said investigations found Rowles had been living with her husband from September 2003.

She said from then to June 2006 Rowles falsely claimed more than £40,000 - made up of more than £32,000 in income support, about £1,500 in council tax benefit and about £6,600 in housing benefit.

Andrew Oliver, for Rowles, said her claims were initially legitimate because she had split up with her husband.

But the couple got back together and her husband was earning the



**BENEFIT FRAUD:** Jane Rowles.

minimum wage. During this time the benefits she continued to claim were used for everyday living expenses.

He added that while Rowles had fraudulently claimed about £40,000, in the same time period she would have actually been entitled to receive benefits of more than £23,000 through the Inland Revenue.

Judge Paul Downes sentenced Rowles to two six-month prison sentences, both suspended for 12 months and to run concurrently. She was also ordered to do 150 hours' unpaid work.

Afterwards James Plaskitt, DWP anti-fraud minister, said: "This is an excellent example of our success at tackling benefit theft. Lying to the DWP to get money you are not entitled to is a crime. Our investigators are equipped with a wide range of powers and techniques to track you down."

## BREAD HEAD



Former bread star Peter Howitt on his new film 'Dangerous Parking' EDP Saturday Magazine



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